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Strengthening local democracy in Scotland: The VAS/TSI perspective

Dr. Oliver Escobar

Report from a forum with VAS/TSI Chief Officers
facilitated by the Academy of Government
to inform COSLA's Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy



Academy of Government
The UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

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Acronyms

LAA – Local Authority Area

LAs – Local Authorities

VAS – Voluntary Action Scotland

TSIs – Third Sector Interfaces

CP – Community Planning

CPP – Community Planning Partnership

Please note that ‘**single inverted commas**’ indicate words and sentences taken verbatim from forum participants (see Annex 2).

Summary

This is a summary of key themes that emerged during a two-hour forum in which TSI Chief Officers discussed how to strengthen local democracy in Scotland.

1. Vision

- Forum participants argued that a vibrant local democracy should be based on the understanding that **politics is more than 'party politics', and democracy is more than 'representative democracy'**. From their perspective, politics is about trying to reshape local worlds in meaningful ways, and therefore volunteering and other civic initiatives are central to local democracy.
- Participants suggested that, in a stronger democracy, **citizen and community participation should be more inclusive and have a clear influence on local policy and decision making**.
- They also argued that **local democracy must become truly local** so that people are engaged where they live, work and can influence things.
- The forum also suggested that a stronger democracy will require LAs to **make their decision making processes more transparent, open, accountable and responsive**.

2. Problems and challenges

- Participants outlined the **democratic deficits of representative democracy**. They argued that party politics sometimes works to the detriment of local problem solving, and gets in the way of communities working out their priorities and solutions. They also argued that many Community Councils are 'neglected', 'don't engage with their community, and their communities don't value their efforts'.
- The forum also discussed the **lack of inclusive and meaningful citizen and community participation in policy and decision making**. Participants argued that the 'imbalance of power and influence' means that 'communities are not empowered to engage, shape the agenda and provide solutions'. Moreover, they criticised the lack of 'support for inclusive participation', particularly with regard to those 'unengaged' and 'hard to reach'.
- Participants also mapped out **problems regarding how 'localities' are defined, and the lack of 'truly local' authorities**. They argued that 'localities are defined at higher levels' rather than 'by people in what they regard as their natural communities'. As a consequence, some participants explained, statutory bodies 'impose structures that communities don't relate to', and this is to the detriment of the 'accountability of civil servants and politicians'.

- Finally, the forum outlined **problems regarding how local authorities and public services function**. For instance, some argued that decisions are often ‘taken outside of politics’, and therefore ‘real power is not actually with elected politicians’ but with ‘officials’, ‘quangos’ and central government, which can hinder ‘a culture of accountability’. Moreover, CPPs were seen as ‘not functioning to their full potential’, and a culture of ‘dependency on the LA breeds lack of involvement’. There were also questions about a potential conflict of interests regarding the functions of LAs –i.e. authorities make policies and deliver services, while at the same time they are also in charge of ‘community support’. Some questioned whether officials are capable of supporting initiatives that may be in the interest of a community but actually go against the priorities of the LA.

3. Ideas, solutions and reforms

- Participants discussed the need to **reinvent local democracy and politics by developing innovative participatory mechanisms and improving representative democracy**. They suggested two key conditions for new forms of public engagement. Firstly, that ‘facilitation of participative mechanisms must be independent of related service delivery’. Secondly, that new participative mechanisms must be ‘subject to scrutiny on equalities’, so that they foster diverse and inclusive participation.
- The forum argued for **citizen empowerment: people as producers, not just consumers**. This entails ‘active local communities and engaged citizens creating social and public goods alongside, but separate from, an active local democratic and inclusive public authority’.
- Participants also supported **making local democracy truly local**. They broadly agreed on the need for ‘more local democracy around critical decisions’, although there were alternative suggestions on how to do this. Many argued for devolving decision making and services to local community level in order to increase participation.
- Finally, the forum agreed on the need to **change the culture of public services**. Participants insisted that public agencies should understand and embrace ‘assets based approaches and solutions’, and to advance in this direction they should start considering ‘social enterprise as an alternative service model’ with the potential to ‘increase engagement and involvement’. Some also argued that it’s necessary to ‘change the economic conversation’ in order to put ‘Social Return on Investment’ and ‘preventative spend’ at the top of the agenda. Others emphasised the need to separate some of the potentially ‘conflicting roles’ of LAs, as noted above, and perhaps to also separate delivery from planning and decision making. Finally, some insisted on the need to improve how public agencies communicate and to remove ‘the language barrier’ that makes some of those communications difficult to understand.

Background

On 3rd of March 2014, 21 TSI Chief Officers met in Glasgow for a two-hour forum on how to strengthen local democracy in Scotland. Please see Annex 4 for the full list of participants.

The author of this report facilitated the forum. The purpose was to articulate the Voluntary Action Scotland / Third Sector Interfaces perspective in order to inform COSLA's Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy. For information on the Commission please follow the link:

<http://www.localdemocracy.info>

Forum format

The forum was designed to maximise inclusion of every participant, including those who may be less inclined to speak in public or prefer other means of sharing their views. This was done through a combination of small table discussions and plenary sessions, and based on both individual work reflected on the coloured-coded cards produced by participants, as well as group work comprising the prioritisation of key points at each table.

The forum programme is included in Annex 1. The table facilitators were recruited from amongst the participants, and provided with a brief (see Annex 3) detailing the facilitation approach and the format used for each session.



About this report

The report outlines themes and points prioritised by forum participants. Most points were broadly supported at the forum, unless stated otherwise. That means that I have focussed on themes and issues where participants agreed, and the format of the forum allowed

checking for consensus or disagreement. For the full transcription of the points made please see Annex 2. The draft report was sent to all participants for feedback before being sent to the Commission.

The forum comprised three sessions, each including group work and plenary deliberation, and organised around three questions:

- What is the VAS/TSIs' vision for local democracy?
- What are the current problems and challenges?
- What are the potential solutions and reforms?

The following sections present key findings from these three sessions.

1. A vision for a vibrant local democracy

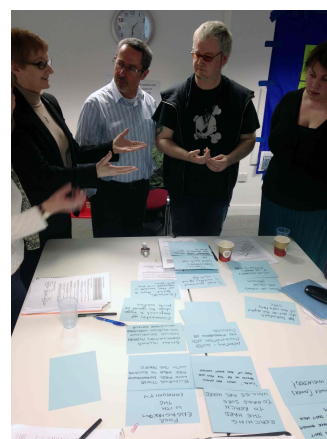
During the first session, forum participants talked about creating a shared vision for a more vibrant local democracy. All their points are collated in Annex 2.

Here I outline the **four overarching themes** for that vision, and share points that gathered broad support during plenary discussions.

a) Understanding that local politics is more than 'party politics' and that local democracy is more than 'representative democracy'

Many participants stressed that there are 'other ways of doing politics' beyond traditional party politics. For instance, when volunteers choose to 'do stuff that makes a difference' they are actually involved in politics. In that sense, politics is about trying to reshape or change local worlds in meaningful ways. This may include, for instance, volunteering, starting social enterprises, participating in social movements, campaigning on local issues, getting organised to solve local problems, and participating in policy and decision making processes.

By the same token, many participants argued that local democracy should be understood as including more than just electoral contests and representative institutions. For instance, a participant stressed that 'democracy does not mean just a numbers game'. The forum's view of what that broader understanding of democracy may entail is articulated in the next theme. However, some participants also argued that the third sector could play a more active role in strengthening representative democracy by 'encouraging all to register to vote' and increase voter turnout.



b) Making citizen and community participation more inclusive and ensuring that it influences local decision making

Participants argued for a new form of local democracy that is more 'participative and inclusive', where people feel empowered to influence policy and public services. This has a collective and an individual dimension. On the one hand, 'communities' should be 'engaged and included' in making decisions that affect them. On the other, individuals 'who require support to have their voices heard' must be adequately supported so that they are not systematically excluded.

c) Making local democracy truly local

Most participants also emphasised the need to make democracy truly local, so that 'local people are engaged in local issues and at a local scale'. However, as participants argued, it is crucial that 'communities define themselves (geographically and thematically) and the agenda'. Some suggested that the rule of thumb is that 'local means where I live and work and I can influence what's going on', or in other words, 'areas people identify with'. This suggests that there is 'no one-size-fits-all solution for different communities', and that ultimately 'local' should be 'defined by community not by any sector or organisation'.

d) Making authorities' decision making processes more transparent, open, accountable and responsive

Finally, another strong theme in this section was the need to improve how local authorities and public agencies operate when it comes to making decisions on policies and public services. Participants insisted on the need for greater transparency and openness in decision making processes, so that everybody has the necessary information, as well as knowledge on how to influence the process.

In turn, transparency and openness would enhance the accountability of public authorities by opening up to scrutiny the black boxes of decision-making processes. In addition, some participants emphasised that public authorities should become more responsive to local needs.

2. Current problems and challenges

During the second session, participants mapped out barriers, problems and challenges that stand in the way of building a more vibrant local democracy.

All the points are collated in Annex 2. Here I outline the **four overarching themes** that emerged.



a) Democratic deficits of representative democracy

The forum felt strongly about the current 'democratic deficit' as reflected by the current 'disconnect between our political systems, elected politicians and the rest of us'. Many criticised that MPs, MSPs, Councillors, and Community Councillors assume that they embody the democratic system. Forum participants argued that that should not be the case, and that democracy should be understood as a broader domain that involves everyone.

Some criticised the logic of party politics and representative democracy, stating that 'the system is broken' and 'the trust is gone'. For others, the problem is that local issues 'become tarnished with a party political position', and that 'party thinking stops new ways of working'. This can be to the detriment of local problem solving.

Regarding Community Councils, many participants pointed out that that they are 'neglected', 'very variable and often dysfunctional'. Others insisted that they are 'not representative', 'not resourced' and 'not powerful'. Moreover, they highlighted a vicious circle that seems to affect this grassroots tier of representative democracy: 'Community Councils don't engage with their community and their communities don't value their efforts'.

b) Lack of inclusive and meaningful citizen and community participation in policy and decision making

Participants argued that there is little 'involvement in decision making', and that the 'imbalance of power and influence' means that 'communities are not empowered to engage, shape the agenda and provide solutions'. Furthermore, as a participant argued, public 'apathy' can be fuelled by 'over-consultation with no feedback or change'. As a result, 'too many people feel disenfranchised –not seeing how they can influence decisions'.

Another central concern was the exclusion of many voices from policy and decision making. Some explained it in terms of a lack of 'support for inclusive participation', particularly with regard to 'the unengaged and hard to reach'. For many, this related to a lack of 'enough effective facilitation of participation', which often results in 'local views taken to be the few who turn up and shout loudest'.

c) Problems regarding how 'localities' are defined, and lack of 'truly local' authorities

There was considerable agreement at the forum that 'localities are defined at higher levels' rather than 'by people in what they regard as their natural communities'. Some argued that 'local government is currently not local' and that 'even the smallest LAs don't feel local'. As a consequence, some explained, statutory bodies 'impose structures

that communities don't relate to', and this is to the detriment of the 'accountability of civil servants and politicians to people'.

Furthermore, a participant emphasised that local decisions 'are far too often overruled by higher tiers of government or endlessly appealed by commercial interests'. Nonetheless, participants recognised the challenges of 'devolving decisions very locally', and in particular the difficulty to 'decentralise in a down turn'.

d) Problems regarding how local authorities and public services function

Forum participants also mapped out problems related to how some LAs and Community Planning Partners work. Firstly, some insisted on a 'reluctance to share information' and a lack of 'enough information to make informed decisions' from 'organisations across the board'.

Nonetheless, a participant qualified this by adding that sometimes there is too much information being circulated indiscriminately, which can be just as damaging because it overwhelms people who don't have the capacity or time to scrutinise it (e.g. third sector representatives, Community Councillors).

Secondly, some argued that often 'decisions are taken outside of politics', and that 'real power is not actually with elected politicians' but with 'officials' and 'quangos' that sometimes act as the 'real power-holders'. This, as a participant put it, hinders 'a culture of accountability'.

Thirdly, for some participants, there may be a potential 'conflict of interest' at play in how LAs and other public services operate. For instance, LAs are simultaneously the lead partner in CPPs, the decision making body regarding services, the service delivery body, as well as the 'community support' agent. Consequently, some questioned whether officials in charge of 'community support' (e.g. to community Councils or local initiatives) are actually capable of supporting decisions and projects that may be in the interest of a community but actually go against the priorities of the LA.

Finally, others insisted on issues around the culture of public services, and how CPPs are 'not functioning to their full potential'. For instance, they argued that predominant economic models don't 'focus enough on Social Return on Investment & preventative spend'. Others pointed out that the culture of 'failure is not an option' stops 'innovation and new approaches'. In turn, some added, a culture of 'dependency on the LA breeds lack of involvement'.

It is important to note that forum participants recognised that most of these problems are not exclusive to Councils and can be found across public agencies. LAs were nonetheless prominent during forum deliberation because of the lead role they take in Community Planning

and the support they provide to Elected Members and Community Councils.

3. Ideas, solutions and reforms

We dedicated the final section to propose ideas, potential solutions and reforms in order to overcome some of the challenges above and get closer to the vision of a more vibrant democracy outlined earlier.

All the points made by forum participants can be seen in Annex 2. Here I outline the **four overarching themes** that emerged most clearly from the deliberative sessions.



a) Reinventing local democracy and politics by developing innovative participatory mechanisms and improving representative democracy

The forum proposed to ‘look to other parts of the world for alternative and innovative forms of democracy’. They insisted on the need to ‘consider new ways to engage people’. Part of this is to improve ‘information and understanding of politics with a small p’, and to learn and share ‘techniques and approaches to influence decisions’. This idea of fostering politics ‘with a small p’ goes back to the argument articulated earlier about broadening the meaning of the word ‘politics’, so that it’s not the preserve of elected representatives. As a participant put it, ‘every volunteer is a politician’ and we should ‘move to participative democracy based on what people choose to do to change the world’.

There were two suggestions about key conditions to be met by new forms of public engagement. Firstly, that 'facilitation of participative mechanisms must be independent of related service delivery (neutral on content)'. Secondly, that any new participative mechanisms must be 'subject to scrutiny on equalities', so that they truly foster diverse and inclusive participation. A participant suggested that a first step in this direction is to improve public engagement in CP structures.

Nonetheless, most participants recognised that ‘democracy needs both representation and participation’, and therefore the challenge is to explore new ways of bringing representative and participatory democracy together. The majority at the forum advocated ‘evolution’ rather than ‘revolution’, although there were a few voices that proposed ‘fundamental reform’ rather than ‘tinkering round the edges’.

b) Citizen empowerment: people as producers, not just consumers

There was a lot of emphasis on stimulating a local democracy where 'people are producers, not just consumers', so that problem solving at local level is carried out 'for and by the people'. The idea is to develop a democratic system 'based on co-operative values and principles'.

This will entail 'active local communities & engaged citizens creating 'social & public goods' alongside, but separate from, an active local democratic & inclusive public authority'. In this new system, people would be 'empowered' to 'define and address issues', as well as to 'challenge rather than complain'. This would generate 'genuine accountability and scrutiny'.

c) Making local democracy truly local

The forum broadly agreed on the need for 'more local democracy around critical decisions', but there were various suggestions on how to go about it. Some suggested devolving decision making and services to local community level in order to increase participation. Others proposed 'turning devolution on its head', so that devolving powers in something that happens from the bottom-up, and 'decisions are made at the most effective level'. This would comprise 'smaller local authorities within regional groupings' and therefore entail 'representation upwards'. Consequently, there would be town level local authorities, more in line with other European countries. A participant added that 'money to support local needs & public goods' would then be 'raised locally, not as a grant from above'. Another participant suggested that this would require 'a clear framework of what is decided at what level, and what rights of appeal exist from one level to another'. A participant also advocated to 'centralise essential services' such as education.

d) Changing the culture of public service delivery

The largest theme in this final session included ideas on how LAs and public services should change in order to build a more vibrant local democracy.

Firstly, forum participants argued that public agencies must understand and embrace 'assets based approaches and solutions', and that this will require a 'fundamental commitment for change in culture' across the board. Key to advancing in this direction will be to start considering 'social enterprise as an alternative service model' with the potential to 'increase engagement and involvement'. Some also argued that it is necessary to 'change the economic conversation' in order to put 'Social Return on Investment' and 'preventative spend' at the top of the agenda.

Secondly, participants insisted on the importance of fostering an environment where people have 'permission to innovate & take risks'. They emphasised the need for 'space for safe (no blame) innovation and delivery' in 'community-led approaches'.

Finally, participants offered ideas on how to improve the role of LAs in local democracy. For instance, there were suggestions to 'separate the conflicting roles of the local council'. This was connected to the previous analysis of the potential 'conflict of interests' at play when LAs are in charge of policy making and service delivery, while at the same time supporting communities to participate in pursuing their own priorities and interests. Another suggestion to improve services was to separate delivery from planning and decision making. Some participants also emphasised the need to increase 'genuine accountability', as well as to remove 'the language barrier' so that communications by public agencies are easier to understand.

Conclusions

The TSI Chief Officers who participated in this two-hour forum seem to agree on some basic principles to guide potential reforms that may be proposed by the Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy.

- Firstly, they support the development of a more participatory democracy driven by citizens and communities. From this perspective, citizens should be seen as producers and not just consumers of politics, policies and services.
- Secondly, they recognise the importance of traditional representative democracy, but argue that it should be revised and improved in order to address its democratic deficits and be more responsive to priorities and solutions proposed by communities.
- Thirdly, participants recognise that the large size of LAs may be a substantial barrier to developing a stronger local democracy, and therefore, reforms should be considered.
- Fourthly, public authorities and services must undergo substantial culture change in order to improve their accountability, as well as open new spaces for citizen and community led policymaking and service delivery.
- Fifthly, the third sector could play a key role in revitalising local democracy, but this will require openness to innovation in public service delivery, and a substantial review of how CP works both at strategic and grassroots level.
- Finally, there is plenty of innovation (e.g. social enterprises, local development trusts) and exemplars (e.g. Shetlands, Western Isles) around the country, as well as internationally. A more vibrant local democracy will require learning from existing practice and then adapting to local needs and circumstances as defined by citizens and communities.

Annex 1– Forum programme

Strengthening local democracy in Scotland:

The VAS/TSI perspective

12.30-14.30pm, 3rd of March 2014

Robertson House, 152 Bath Street, Glasgow

A forum with VAS/TSI Chief Officers

facilitated by the Academy of Government (University of Edinburgh)
to inform COSLA's Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy.

12.30	Introductions to the Commission and this forum
12.40	What is VAS/TSI's vision for local democracy?
13.15	What are the current problems and challenges?
13.45	What are the potential solutions and reforms?
14.25	Wrap up: What happens next?
14.30	Close

Annex 2– Contributions by forum participants

The following tables collate all the points (written in coloured-coded cards) contributed by participants during the three sessions of the forum. I have grouped them by themes, although many issues clearly overlap. When I did not manage to include a point in the overarching themes, or couldn't understand its context, I added it at the end of each table. The tables include both the cards that each group prioritised for plenary discussion (Priority Cards), and the rest of cards generated by participants during small group discussion (Other Cards).

Session 1 What is VAS/TSI's vision for local democracy? [Green cards]	
Themes	Cards written by forum participants
Understanding that politics is more than 'party politics' and that democracy is more than 'representative democracy'	Priority Cards: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Party politics is not always the norm; note: other ways of doing politics • An end to decision making by 'party lines', the wishes of the 'governing part' (or coalition) • VAS helps where each person to believe that a vote counts so voter turnout in any democratic process is 90% + Other cards: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where the power that volunteers show by choosing to do stuff that makes a difference also shapes democratic power • Persuade councils to listen and act on local issues on a non-political basis. • Democracy that does not mean just a numbers game • We are the conduits for encouraging all to register to vote • Everyone is supported to understand democracy
Making citizen and community participation more inclusive and ensuring that it influences local decision making	Priority Cards: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities * being engaged in and included with decisions affecting them (*of interest+geog.) • Participative +inclusive • Individuals who require support to have their voices heard are supported • That our children see society as something they are part of- that they can change things: regardless of who you are and the power you wield Other cards: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many ways for any individual to participate and contribute views are supported • Everyone feels part of or knows how to be part of, the

	<p>discussion, decision and delivery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More people are actively involved • Inclusive • Capable of being fully inclusive and engaging of all • Involvement of those whose voice is not often heard • That everyone has a voice and the right to be heard • Everybody engaged and involved • It is ok for people to choose not to be involved • Increased community involvement • Regular reviews of participation + inputs to gauge participation across sectors / groups / themes • Excellent community engagement/participation before plans are in place • More involvement with local council • Wider involvement of local 'politicians' – power brokers • Increased involvement in decision making • People should believe that they can change things • Able to “influence” all service deliver + changes • Engagement to the point of empowerment • Community views have more sway/equal power
Making local democracy truly local	<p>Priority Cards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local people engaged in local issues and at a local scale • Communities define themselves (geographical and thematic) and the agenda • Local democracy- 'local' means local- but related to 'others'. Local to me means where I live and work and I can influence what's going on <p>Other cards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Something people can engage with where they are • Local people identify and work with others to resolve issues important to them • Representative of local people and issues • Recognising that there is no 'one size fits all' solution for different communities • 'Local' to be defined by community not by any sector or organisation • Emphasis on the local • Local is small! – areas people identify with
Making authorities' decision making processes more transparent, open, responsive and accountable	<p>Priority Cards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparent decision making in multiple and simple ways; relevance to local community • Access to information – transparency + openness <p>Other cards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everybody has a simple + known way to input into process- multiple ways • A responsive, engaging, accountable and recognisable • Transparent decision-making... community can see how/where it has influenced

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equality, transparency, openness • Transparency- regular reporting + feedback un-edited • Elected officials face public scrutiny annually • When a local authority makes a democratic decision, it should only be overruled at a 'higher' level in extremely rare circumstances, e.g. overwhelming national interest/ecological sustainability/human rights issues • Local government is responsive and proportionate to real needs • Local democratic bodies should not be subject to endless appeals/legal challenges by corporate interests with well-paid lawyers
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands assets • Quality is more important than efficiency • Action not just decisions

Session 2 What are the current problems and challenges? [Blue cards]	
Themes	Cards written by forum participants
Democratic deficits of representative democracy	<p>Priority Cards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democratic deficit- people do not feel connected or represented- love participation; note: all electoral and beyond • MP, MSP, Councillors- assume to be democratic process, Community Councillors- but this is not the democratic system. Democracy should be everyone. <p>Other cards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The system is broken • The trust is gone • Party thinking' stops new ways of working • Deep-rooted party political networks- all issues ('local' & otherwise) become tarnished with a party political position • Democratic process is seen purely as the domain of elected members+ political parties • MP, MSP, Councillors, Community Councillors assume to be the democratic system. But, this is not the democratic system; democracy everywhere • There is a disconnect between our political systems- elected politicians- and the rest of us • Individuals do not see the impact of the way they vote • People that want to be politicians often least likely to be democratic in behaviour • Elected councillors presence: friend or FOE?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some communities have limited access to their representatives + engagement processes • Is an active 3rd sector an adequate substitute for real, statutory local democracy? • Some 'democratic' groups; smug + self-sustaining cannot easily be challenged • Community councils (a form of local Democracy) are very variable and often dysfunctional • Community councils are ineffective: not representative, not engaging, not resourced, not powerful • Community councils neglected! • Community councils don't engage with their community +/- communities don't value their efforts
Lack of inclusive and meaningful citizen and community participation in policy and decision making	<p>Priority Cards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No/little involvement in decision making, big agenda, big solutions • Infrastructural / structural exclusion • 'Local' views are often taken to be the few who turn up and shout loudest • Not enough effective facilitation of participation, i.e. people can opt out on peoples own terms of society <p>Other cards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imbalance of power and influence • Communities not empowered to engage, shape the agenda and provide solutions • Decisions are made without proper independent consultation • Apathy – over consultation with no feedback or change • Level of involvement and belief of people • Too many people feel disenfranchised- not seeing how they influence decisions • Not enough recognition of multiple sources of support for inclusive participation • Lack of consultation on issues relating to the voluntary sector • Poor engagement with the community • People as producers not consumers • Reaching the hard to reach to make sure voices are heard • Ensuring those who feel disenfranchised are able to engage with the process • The loudest voices are heard- the unengaged & hard to reach • Getting everyone involved (or interested!) • People can 'opt-out' of society
Problems regarding how 'localities' are defined, and lack of 'truly local	<p>Priority Cards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Localities' are defined at 'higher' levels not by people in what they regard as their 'natural' communities [what decisions at what level] • We're talking about maybe 100's of truly local authorities in Scotland, while Gov't insiders are talking of maybe reducing the number from 32-11 <p>Other cards:</p>

authorities'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ultimate accountability of civil servants + politicians to people • Statutory structures impose structures that communities don't relate to • (Councils) democratically voted units are too big • 'Local' government is currently not local....way to big • Even smallest L.A.s don't feel local • Challenge of devolving decisions very locally • How many 'local' areas would there be? • Locally- made decisions are far too often overruled by 'higher' tiers of Gov't or endlessly appealed by commercial interests with well-paid lawyers • Decentralise in a down turn • Level at which a topic is debated and agreed
Problems regarding how local authorities and public services work	<p>Priority Cards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough information to make informed decisions; note: organisation across the board • Real power not actually with elected politicians?; note: i.e. officials may naturally see the real power-holders • Local authority is lead partner of CPP as well as service delivery agency + "community support" (e.g. community councils) –conflict of interests" <p>Other cards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough information to make informed decisions • Reluctance to share information • Service delivery inside decision making body • "Failure is not an option" stops innovation/new approaches • Not a culture of accountability • CPP not functioning to its potential • Economic model doesn't focus enough on SROI [Social Return on Investment] & preventative spend • Accessing the decision – true- makers • Decisions taken outside of politics- quangos, etc. • Dependency culture on local authority breeds lack of involvement • Too many non-aligning strategies (symptom and cause) • A municipal approach –"Council will deliver"– prohibits alternative ways of delivering services • Politicians and officers don't feel like a team
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of understanding of sector in decision making processes • Small island communities already making significant social/econ. improvements- volunteer fatigue

Session 3

What are the potential solutions and reforms?

[Yellow cards]	
Themes	Cards written by forum participants
Reinventing local democracy and politics by developing new participatory mechanisms and improving representative democracy	<p>Priority Cards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look to other parts of the world for alternative/innovative forms of democracy • Democracy needs both representation and participation. Discuss!? (evolution rather than revolution) <p>Other cards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole system needs fundamental reform- community democracy cannot be achieved in current political democracy: root & branch, bottom-up- change needed. Pragmatically –the self-serving system would not adopt this, so we can only go on tinkering round the edges: box ticking • Information and understanding of politics with a small ‘p’ and techniques and approaches to influence decisions • Every volunteer is a politician- move to participative democracy based on what people choose to do to change the world • Consider new ways to engage the people • Support engagement on CP structures • Participative democratic mechanism subject to scrutiny on equalities • Facilitation of participative democratic mechanisms must be independent or related service delivery (neutral on content) • MSPs and Councillors should be interviewed and have a process for selection • Mitigate negative personal element from local politics?- relationship between some has more power over the whole
Citizen empowerment: people as producers, not just consumers	<p>Priority Cards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People empowered to challenge rather than complain, i.e. genuine accountability & scrutiny • Solutions for + by the people • People as producers not just consumers • We need to move to systems of user/consumer democracy based on co-operative values & principles <p>Other cards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empower people to define and address issues • Active local communities & engaged citizens creating ‘social & public goods’ alongside, but separate from an active local democratic & inclusive public authority • Encouraging and involving approach
Making local democracy truly local	<p>Other cards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make local democracy local and democratic • More local democracy around critical decisions • Devolve decision making to a local community level • Agree priorities for devolved services to local level to increase participation. Localities = community

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make it more local- (how is this resourced) • Twin-track “decision making” at a local level: local democracy, local politics • Turn devolution on its head (we’re still in pre-French revolution mode!) (i.e. power flowing down from ‘God’ through ‘the king’, etc.) • Smaller “local” authorities within regional groupings “Rep upwards” • Lots more local authorities (town level- more like European average) • Decisions made at most effective level • A clear framework of what is decided at what level, and what ‘rights of appeal’ exist from one level to another • Can we define what is strategic and what is “local” decision making & design a system to fit • Centralise essential services no more 32 [unreadable]! (Education!) • No more local authorities • Money to support local needs & public goods is raised locally (not as a grant from above) • Reinvestment at community council level- ask why is this not working • Local partnerships & locality working- decisions made by elected not appointed boards NHS
Changing the culture of public service delivery	<p>Priority Cards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space for safe (no blame) innovation-community led approaches- and delivered? • Fundamental commitment to change in culture, e.g. assets based approaches; note: across the board • Change the economic conversation: SROI and preventative spend (e.g. social enterprise, development trust) • Buy local cabbages: the solution is to allow us to do this (i.e. asset-based solutions; universality vs localism) • Separate the conflicting roles of the local council • Separate delivery from decision + planning • Complete change. Discuss!? [note: variation across Scotland: places that work and places that don’t] <p>Other cards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Our islands our future’ as a model for local autonomy • Social enterprise as alternative service delivery model • Increase social enterprise to increase engagement/involvement • Try new things + share ideas • Focus on quality & continuous improvement • Asset based approaches common • Encourage risk taking • Permission to innovate & take risks • Investment in preventative agenda • Genuine accountability!! • Increased top level accountability • Quality information to all to ensure understanding of the current political systems (local + national)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate the public • clean, local' language in communication(s) (people need to understand what's being said)' • The language barrier
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise different kinds of communities- local + interest + workplace +online? • Integrated budget and taxation debates • Expand Scot Gov't representation more locally • Culture change- what is my job? • Public security of budget holders, decision makers

Annex 3– Facilitator brief

- Your job is to ensure that everyone has opportunities to participate, that everyone's ideas are respected, that no one dominates and that the task is done effectively.
- There is little time and a lot of work, so time-keeping is essential. You may contribute to the conversation, but please lead by example and avoid taking too much 'air time'.

Structure for Table Deliberation:

1. **Quiet time [2 minutes]**. Read the question on the screen and allow participants 2 minutes of quiet time to write their points on cards. Important:
 - a. Use the bingo pens and cards provided (session 1 = green; session 2 = blue; session 3 = yellow)
 - b. One statement per card. If a participant has several points to contribute please ask them to write each point on a different card
2. **Sharing [5 minutes]**. Invite each participant to briefly share their points and place the cards on the table so that everyone can see them. Important:
 - a. This round is just to listen to all the points; discussion will take place at the next round and the plenary.
3. **Prioritising [8 minutes]**. Participants discuss the points made and prioritise 3 cards to be taken to the plenary discussion. Important:
 - a. Explain that all the cards will be collected for the report, but now we are deciding the priorities to be discussed at the plenary.
 - b. Allow discussion and clarification of the cards. Participants may want to merge similar cards into a new one.
 - c. Finally, seek consensus on the 3 cards that you will take to the plenary. If the group can't reach consensus, ask participants to vote by marking with a dot their preferred 3 cards. Then tally the votes and check that the group agrees.

SESSIONS / TIMINGS / QUESTIONS

Session 1 12.40 – 1.15pm	Session 2 1.15 – 1.45	Session 3 1.45 – 2.25pm
<u>What is VAS/TSI's vision for local democracy?</u> (Green cards)	<u>What are the current problems and challenges?</u> (Blue cards)	<u>What are the potential solutions and reforms?</u> (Yellow cards)

Annex 4– Delegates list

Alan Young	CVS Aberdeenshire - Central and South
Karen Herbert	CVS Falkirk and District
Ian Bruce	CVS Inverclyde
Bill Clements	CVS Inverclyde
Mhairi Wylie	Highland TSP
Helen MacKinnon	PKAVS
Alasdair Tollemache	Stirlingshire VE
Amanda Ptolomey	The Trust - Inverclyde
David Coulter	Third Sector First Dumfries & Galloway
Fabio Villani	tsiMORAY
Anne Kidd	VA East Renfrewshire
Kenny Moffat	VA North Lanarkshire
Gail Anderson	VA Orkney
Gordon Bennie	VA South Lanarkshire
Keith Anderson	VC Aberdeenshire
Harriet Eadie	VC Edinburgh
Niall Sommerville	Voluntary Action Scotland
Calum Irving	Voluntary Action Scotland
Anne Robertson	Voluntary Action Shetland
Jim Gallacher	Voluntary Sector Gateway West Lothian
David Maxwell	Volunteer Glasgow
Eliot Stark	STRiVE
Alice McArdle	VC East Ayrshire
Gilbert Grieve	East Dunbartonshire VA